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DE RUEHPU #1317/01 2601917
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8855
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 2057
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 0231
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1832
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2416
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0322
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 1256
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001317

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR, DRL, S/CRS, INR/IAA
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
TREASURY FOR MAUREEN WAFER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: AEMR ASEC HA PGOV USAID

SUBJECT: HAITI: KEY BRIDGES IN RUINS

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¶11. (U) Summary: Embassy USAID officials, a USAID engineer, and military engineers from the USS Kearsarge visited five damaged bridges September 13-14 to make a preliminary damage assessment. Damaged and destroyed bridges have cut off key transportation arteries and made the provision of emergency assistance excessively dependent on helicopter transport. The two most strategic bridges now inoperable are the Latheme in Mirebalais and the Montrouis in the town of the same name, both on routes leading from the capital to Gonaives, the urban area hardest hit by the recent series of hurricanes and floods. End summary.

¶12. (U) Accompanied by Embassy PolCouns, the group visited the Latheme Bridge in Mirebalais Sept. 14, a 30 meter-long, one span/two lane metallic bridge that carries traffic on one of the routes from Port au Prince to the coastal city of Gonaives. The settled area of Mirebalais extends to just a few yards from the river's edge. All that remained of the bridge were the stumps of two abutments on either side of river bed. The metal span had been torn off its abutments and had come to rest 200 meters downstream. That slightly bent but still intact structure served as a playground and diving board for neighborhood children. A series of small boats just upstream from the bridge carried passenger traffic across the river. The river had surged several meters over its banks, as indicated by the sandy, washed out ground and the tattered remnants of homes built mere yards away from the river bank. Residents told us they had been forced to flee for their lives early in the morning of August 31 as the river rose very suddenly. Engineers' on-sight assessment was that once water levels fell further, a culvert bridge could be built as a temporary crossing while a more permanent metal or concrete bridge was erected.

¶13. (U) USAID officials and U.S. military engineers on September 13 visited the Montrouis Bridge, a two-lane, two-span concrete structure approximately 53 meters long supported by two abutments and a central pier. This bridge, located about 50 miles northwest of Port-au-Prince on National Route 1, lies along the principal access route from the capital to northern Haiti and the Artibonite Department, whose capital is Gonaives. It is the most strategically important bridge damaged in the recent storms. The damaged bridge supported pedestrian but no vehicle traffic. The

central pier under the bridge had tilted and sunk, causing caving of the bridge deck. The team observed cracks in the concrete beams under the deck. The engineers thought it was questionable the structure could be salvaged. The Director General of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport happened to be on the scene, and shared with the USG team his initial impression that the bridge was a loss and would have to be replaced by a permanent metallic or concrete bridge. He opposed installing a temporary Bailey bridge, since he feared it would become a de facto permanent solution.

¶14. (U) USAID and U.S. military engineers from the USS Kearsarge visited the one-lane/one span Ennery Bridge Sept. ¶13. This structure lies along the route from Gonaives to Cap Haitien in the north. One abutment was washed away, leaving the span partially submerged. Once waters subside, a culvert crossing as a temporary expedient may be feasible.

¶15. (U) The same team on September 13 visited the Duvivier Bridge on route 9 just north of Port-au-Prince, constructed by U.S. military engineers in 1994. The 30-meter metallic bridge is supported by two abutments and a central support of three piers. The bridge was still open to traffic, but the protective structures of both abutments are severely damaged. These structures require immediate intervention to prevent catastrophic damage in future flooding.

¶16. (U) Another team of Embassy officials and USS Kearsarge engineers visited the Miragoane (du Parc) bridge the second week of September. The 28-meter, one-span, one lane bridge connects Miragoine with points east, including Port-au-Prince. One abutment had dropped approximately one meter due to washout of the foundation. A large section of fill behind one abutment was washed out. The bridge cannot

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be used by vehicular traffic. However, water levels were low enough to allow vehicular traffic to drive across the river. This will be the immediate expedient until a short-term culvert/earth bridge can be constructed. Engineers assessed that the long-term solution is to repair the abutment.

SANDERSON